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ABSTRACT

This discussion is limited to specific opportunities and methods of supervising students rather than encompassing supervisory techniques in general. This paper: (1) examines the characteristics of student workers from the supervisory point of view, (2) notes the type of structures for supervising student field experience, (3) suggests supervisory functions, and (4) summarizes the potentials of good supervision. It is assumed for purposes of this report that productive work is a factor in the field experience situation. The degree of productive work will vary depending on the structure used and objectives of the particular program; however, implicit in a discussion of supervision is the expectation of some product or service. The characteristics of students, therefore, are discussed in terms of the possibilities and limitations of students as manpower that should be recognized by a supervisor both for effective manpower utilization and for greatest learning. (Author/PG)

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The Role Of The AGENCY SUPERVISOR

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THE ROLE OF THE AGENCY SUPERVISOR

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Artwork by Lanny Phillips

THE ROLE OF THE AGENCY SUPERVISOR

A few years ago, a law student completing his final report on an internship project in the area of legal services remarked to his agency supervisor, "You know the way in which I write this report will not just make a difference between an A and a B in a course, but will make a difference in the lives of people." This student was standing on the bridge between academic studies and the world of reality. Assisting him in crossing this bridge and seeing the view from its span was an agency supervisor. Supervisors of students in field experience situations are special kinds of educators. Typically, they are professionals in their fields and have other supervisory responsibilities.

This discussion is limited to specific opportunities and methods of supervising students rather than encompassing supervisory techniques in general. Certainly, basic tenets of good supervision apply to the use of students in work situations as well as to regular employees. Different objectives, however, and differences between students and non-students require special approaches in supervising field experience. This paper examines the characteristics of student workers from a supervisory point of view; the types of structures for supervising student field experience are noted; supervisory functions are suggested; and the potentials of good supervision are summarized. It is assumed for purposes of this discussion that productive work is a factor in the field experience situation. The degree of productive work will vary depending on the structure used and

objectives of the particular program; however, implicit in a discussion of supervision is the expectation of some product or service. The characteristics of students, therefore, are discussed in terms of the responsibilities and limitations of student manpower which should be recognized by a supervisor bent on effective manpower utilization and the greatest learning.

One rather obvious characteristic of student manpower is its short-term availability. Internships or other field experience situations generally range from one month to one year. Short-term availability has very important implications for planning effective programs. The tasks assigned must be possible to accomplish within the time limits of the assignment. A schedule of responsibilities to be completed in a much shorter period than would normally be the case with other employment. Furthermore, the student's short-term involvement and perception of time in general is important in terms of his own expectations and attitudes. What seems like a short time to a supervisor relative to other forms of employment seems often like a long time to the student who is used to relating in much smaller increments of time. One of the resulting problems caused by these different perceptions of time is that of expectations of results. Students tend to think they can accomplish more in a short time than they can. Supervisors may err on the other side, thinking that there can be more accomplished than they can. If students are encouraged in unrealistic expectations of an assignment, their experience will end in frustration. On the other hand, if not enough expectation is built into the program, an opportunity for stretching the student to apply his utmost resources may have been lost.

Another characteristic of student manpower is

want a personal involvement in results.

Another characteristic of student workers is their relative freedom. Partly because they are involved for short periods of time, they are free from the responsibilities of longer-range interest. They can be used for short-term projects in many cases more effectively than can longer-term employees because they can devote full time and attention to one task. Students are able to function at a great variety of levels in an organization and do not need to be restricted to the usual hierarchies of an organization chart. One student intern supervisor observed that his students served as a form of media, carrying information from various levels of the organization to other levels, in a way which other forms of communication could not accomplish. Students are not restrained by experience. Lack of experience limits what they can do, but also provides an opportunity for a fresh look and a new approach. As one student expressed: "I haven't learned yet what can't be done." Students are expendable. They can afford to make mistakes and, therefore, to take risks that persons with longer-term employment could not or would not. Because they are students, they are excused for mistakes and the results can be handled with a minimum of disruption. Recognition of this opens up a wider vista for potential assignments of students and may take them into areas that can be better served by this form of manpower than by any other.

Another important characteristic of good field experience programs is that the student has educational goals as well as manpower goals. This can add important dimensions to the student's manpower usefulness and affects supervision. Because of educational goals, he tends to approach his tasks

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mentioned briefly here to indicate some of the different supervisory situations which result.

and [illegible] some other such term. Supervision of such positions follows traditional [illegible] job descriptions, office procedures, [illegible] set of relationships with other [illegible] uses its 1400 students as [illegible] every college [illegible] student work [illegible] from weaving to [illegible] Most colleges have some [illegible] but few are designed [illegible] experience.

[illegible] type of structure as what might be termed [illegible] In these cases, the student is [illegible] non-productive situation where his [illegible] observation and academic reports. [illegible] in these cases is generally limited to [illegible] procedures for orientation and seeing that [illegible] followed and that some information and understanding is in fact passed on.

A third type of structure often used in internships is that of the special assistant. This is a position approach, but generally outside of the usual personnel structures. A student may be an assistant to a city manager for a period or an aide to a legislator. In such positions, supervision is generally highly personal and the main benefit that is seen is the association by the student with a professional of high caliber. If care is not taken in this situation, the student may end up being an errand boy doing tasks that arise from day to day

students, the trainee is present to himself as success is measured in terms of his development. The supervisor must, therefore, integrate the educational needs of the student and the production needs of the task in an effective learning and service situation. Patience and perseverance are necessary ingredients in the supervisory process if it is to be successful.

Absolutely basic to all good field experience situations is effective planning. The position, project, or other form of assignment should be carefully defined with a clear understanding between parties as to the expectations in terms of both productivity and educational growth. The supervisor's role in this planning is in applying his knowledge of what is possible given time constraints, resources, and his organization's purpose and scope. It is useful to define the assignment of a prospective intern in general terms and then in very specific terms with indications of steps to be taken, at

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more general orientation relating the particular experience to the general goals of the field experience program is better accomplished after the student is somewhat secure in his field experience situation. If this is attempted in detail before placement, it may seem to the student to be an academic exercise. When it is done after the student is functioning and well grounded in his agency, it takes on real meaning and can be most helpful. The most important parts of the agency orientation is an understanding of the objectives of the assignment and of the setting in which learning is to take place. It is important at the very beginning to establish a schedule for meeting with the student and the other agency personnel involved. Time for consultation, ideas for initial steps to be taken, and at least tentative dates for different stages. The schedule may be revised from time to time, but no good project should begin without a preliminary schedule.

During the student's assignment, guidance and direction is important, both at regularly scheduled periods and between times. It is through this supervisory attention to the student's progress that standards of performance should be stressed and that the production of the work assigned should be measured. It is important to the assignment that the student be reminded that what he is doing is of importance and is to be measured on the basis of usefulness as well as in terms of his own growth. Periodically, in addition to day to day guidance, time should be set aside for a review of progress to date and revisions of schedule, looking forward. Most effectively, such review should include representatives of the academic institution involved, and perhaps other people within the agency. A system of written reports also is

important to direction, review, and the pursuit of objectives.

Throughout the assignment, the supervisor should help the student interpret the experience he is having and the relationships of what he is doing to the work of the agency and of others. He should cooperate with the academic institution's representatives in interpreting the student's experience in relation to broader concerns, academic studies, models, and theories. Through relationships with the student and his academic representative, all parties can grow by learning from each other. Relationships should develop as seekers of knowledge and workers in common goals, each of whom has particular contributions to make, rather than as a master and apprentice in which all learning is presumed to flow in one direction. In many cases where the student is assigned a specific project, he quickly becomes the expert in his assignment and knows more about the particular situation than either his supervisor or his academic representative. This can be very stimulating to the student and if supervisors are not threatened, the student's "expertise" can be very helpful to the organization.

The supervisor should be sensitive to problems that may develop either in pursuit of the assignment or in the personal relations in which the intern or student is engaged. Most often, failure in a field experience situation relates not to the job assignment, but to relationships between people. A student should understand in the beginning the policies and standards of the organization and his responsibility of working in this environment. He should be given status and the necessary contacts and tools to do his task. If in spite of this problems develop to the point of impairing the effectiveness of the project or the well being of the organization or student,

termination should probably occur. The machinery for termination should be well established before the program begins and described in the orientation of the student. Such information is necessary in case either the supervisor and the academic representative agree an assignment may not mean failure to learn. Sometimes one learns most from negative experience.

Toward the end of an assignment, the supervisory role usually becomes more intense. Considerable attention should be given to the student to see that he completes his assignment activity within the time limit and that he recognizes the necessity of closing activities as a close rather than beginning of the last minute or suddenly having to leave without having completed anything. A student who has been interested in his task often has this problem of stopping productively. An evaluation of the program should be held with the student before he is done in terms of his progress individually and in terms of his contribution to the agency. The objectives of this evaluation should be to assist the student in his growth, to improve the field experience program, and to help the agency and supervisor in their use of students. A further evaluation after the student is gone of his contribution and growth is often helpful as a more objective review tempered by time.

Often, the interpersonal relations that develop between a supervisor and a student are among the most significant parts of the student's experience. Taking an interest in the student and his total activities and sharing with him feelings and interests beyond the work situation can be very helpful, particularly where the student is in a new environment. The supervisor, whether or not he wishes such a role, becomes part of the student's image of what it means to be a

professional in the world of work. The supervisor is a model which the student may seek to emulate or to reject. This places a special responsibility on those who supervise student programs to conduct themselves in ways which they would wish others to follow. A willingness to share oneself in this way can make a real difference in the kind of experience a student has and in his views of his profession and his future service.

The supervisor's task includes maintaining effective relationships with the representatives of the educational institution involved. Contacts should be maintained from the early planning stages through the assignment period and beyond for evaluation and follow up. These relationships can be stimulating and very productive, both for the supervisor in his role in the agency and the academic representative in his role in the university.

In summary, good supervision in a field experience program can assure that everybody gains. An effective program benefits the agency by the contributions of the student; the educational institution benefits by finding a stimulating relationship between the world of reflection and the world of action; most importantly, the student benefits by having made a contribution, by learning how to accomplish a task, and by his interpretation of his experience for his own understanding and growth. The supervisor's particular role is to assure the discipline of labor with its demand for action and test of usefulness to motivate, to direct, and to measure progress toward both educational and manpower goals.